

## Lesson Twelve

(4:2-18)

### Final Exhortations (4:2-6)

*2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; 3 and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, 4 that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.*

*5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one.*

**V. 2 Continue Steadfastly In Prayer** – The Colossians were to “persist in” and “adhere to” prayer. This kind of persistent prayer was characteristic of the early church (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; etc.). It is the kind of prayer Jesus taught, with the determination not to give up (Luke 11:5-13) or grow weary (Luke 18:1-8).

**Being Watchful In It With Thanksgiving** – To be “watchful” is to be “fully awake and alert.” Prayer time is not to be a casual rest period producing drowsiness. It is a time for action!

Prayer should always be accompanied with thankfulness and gratitude. (See 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17.)

**V. 3 And Pray For Us Also** – Paul has spoken very little about his own predicament in Rome. Now, finally, one expects to hear him appeal for prayers in his behalf. He does make such an appeal, but with a surprising twist!

**That God May Open To Us A Door For The Word** – Paul asked prayer not so much for himself as for his work. Even though preaching the gospel had caused him this imprisonment, he was eager for God to open the door to more opportunities. It seems possible that the progress of the gospel among the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) was a direct answer to this prayer.

**To Declare The Mystery Of Christ** – It was Paul’s privilege to proclaim Christ, the secret plan of God for the salvation of men (1:25-28).

**On Account Of Which I Am In Prison** – Literally, “I am bound.” As noted in Phil. 1:12, Paul was not actually in a Roman dungeon. He was in a private dwelling (Acts 28:30), constantly chained to a succession of Roman soldiers.

Even now Paul does not ask for their prayers in behalf of himself and his imprisonment.

**V. 4 That I May Make It Clear, As I Ought To Speak** – Since the power was in the message (Rom. 1:16) and not the messenger, Paul’s only concern was that he present the message in a clear and “openly manifest” way.

**V. 5 Conduct Yourselves Wisely Toward Outsiders** – The Colossians were to “walk in wisdom” toward people outside the body of Christ. Their Christian conduct was their best answer to those who might revile and accuse them (I Pet. 3:16).

Some of the earliest accusations against Christians were that they were atheists, cannibals, and participants in love orgies! They were atheists because they rejected all known gods and claimed to worship an “invisible God.” They were cannibals because they ate the flesh and drank the blood of their Leader. They had some kind of secret orgy when they assembled together for their “Love Feast.”

**Making The Most Of The Time** – This is also translated “redeeming” the time and means to “buy up a precious commodity.” In this case, the commodity is time. It is precious because every Christian lives in a critical point in history, where the eternal destiny of souls hangs in the balance. It is also precious because once it is lost, it can never be regained. (See Eph. 5:16.)

**V. 6 Let Your Speech Always Be Gracious** – Especially in the context of preaching (v. 3) and behavior toward outsiders (v. 5), the Christian must choose his wording carefully so that it will be “acceptable” and gracious. He is not to compromise the truth, but he must not make the truth unnaturally repulsive by his blunt and offensive presentation.

**Seasoned With Salt** – Neither is the Christian’s speech to be insipid. His words can be tasteful and appealing. (The pagan use of “salt” to mean “wit” may have some application here.)

**So That You May Know How You Ought To Answer Every One** – Just as Paul wanted to be able to preach clearly as he ought, he wanted the Colossians to know how to speak in defense of the gospel as they ought. (See I Pet. 3:15.)

### Personal Greetings (4:7-18)

*7 Tychicus will tell you all about my affairs; he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of yourselves. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.*

*10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, receive him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of*

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*the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of yourselves, a servant of Christ, greets you, always remembering you earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. 15 Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord."*

*18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my fetters. Grace be with you.*

**V. 7 Tychicus Will Tell You** – Tychicus was himself an Asian (Acts 20:4), so he was a logical choice among Paul's co-workers to deliver the epistles to Ephesus (Eph. 6:21) and Colossae. He is also named as Paul's messenger in II Tim. 4:12 and Titus 3:12.

**Beloved Brother And Faithful Minister And Fellow Servant** – The word for "minister" is simply "one who serves," and the word for "servant" is "slave." Tychicus and Epaphras (1:7) are the only ones Paul called "fellow-slaves."

**V. 8 I have Sent Him To You For This Very Purpose** – If we are correct in connecting Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon as being delivered together (see 1:2), Tychicus was accomplishing a three-fold purpose:

- a. To deliver the three epistles
- b. To encourage the local saints with news about Paul.
- c. To accompany Onesimus, the runaway slave, safely back to his former master.

**V. 9 And With Him Onesimus, The Faithful And Beloved Brother, Who Is One Of Yourselves** – Onesimus was a runaway slave who had left his master Philemon in Colossae. He had fled to Rome, where he met the imprisoned apostle and was converted (Philemon 10). Now Paul was sending him back, along with Tychicus and a personal note to Philemon.

The phrase "one of yourselves," meaning "he is a Colossian too," is also used of Epaphras in verse 12.

**V. 10 Aristarchus My Fellow Prisoner Greet You** – Aristarchus was a convert from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4) who joined Paul on the third missionary journey (Acts 19:29). During the riot at Ephesus, he was one of the two associates of Paul dragged by the mob into the public assembly. He was also aboard the ship that took Paul to

Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27:2) and shared the imprisonment with him.

**And Mark The Cousin Of Barnabas** – Mark was the young man who abruptly went home in the middle of the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:13). Because of Mark's failure, Paul was unwilling to take him on the second journey (Acts 15:36-38). Notice now, however, how completely Paul has received Mark as a fellow worker and how he is eager to have the Colossians receive him too.

**V. 11 Jesus Who Is Called Justus** – "Jesus" was not an uncommon name, being the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua.

**The Only Men Of The Circumcision Among My Fellow Workers** – These three—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus—were born and raised as Jews. All of Paul's other associates at this time were of Gentile birth.

**V. 12 Epaphras, Who Is One Of Yourselves** – Like Onesimus (v. 9), Epaphras was from Solossae. He had played a key role in the planting of the church in that city (1:7).

**A Servant Of Christ** – Literally, "slave or bondservant."

**Always Remembering You Earnestly In His Prayers, That You May Stand Mature And Fully Assured In All The Will Of God** – The concern of Epaphras was identical to the concern of Paul. He wanted his brethren to be "full-grown" (as in 1:28) and "completely convinced" (as in 2:2). Epaphras was keenly aware of the dangerous new heresy in Colossae, and his earnest prayer was for the qualities which would enable the Colossian Christians to stand against it.

**V. 13 He Has Worked Hard For You And For Those In Laodicea And In Hierapolis** – Epaphras had worked hard (a common word for "struggle in battle") to evangelize this important triangle of cities in the Lycus River Valley. Hierapolis (meaning "sacred city") was located 15 miles north of Colossae and was an important center for several pagan cults. Laodicea was mentioned previously (2:1).

**V. 14 Luke The Beloved Physician** – It is from this reference that we know the profession of Luke. He was apparently a Gentile Christian (v. 11) who joined Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:10, where Paul's team changed from "they" to "we"). He was a loyal companion to Paul, staying with him even when all others had left (II Tim. 4:11). He later authored the Gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts.

**And Demas** – Demas did not remain loyal. Later he was to forsake Paul in prison, "in love with this present world" (II Tim. 4:10).

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**V. 15 Give My Greetings To The Brethren At Laodicea, And To Nympha And The Church In Her House** —There is no evidence of churches owning property and erecting special buildings for worship before the third century. In earlier years, the “house-church” seems to have been the norm, since government persecution made anything larger impractical. The following “house-churches” are named in scripture:

- a. House of Philemon (Philemon 2)
- b. House of Mary (Acts 12:12)
- c. House of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19)
- d. House of Nympha (Col. 4:15)
- e. (?) House of Gaius (Rom. 16:23)
- f. (?) House of Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40)

**V. 16 And When This Letter Has Been Read Among You, Have It Read Also In The Church Of The Laodiceans; And See That You Read Also The Letter From Laodicea** – This letter “out of Laodicea” has been an intriguing puzzle as far back as the second century. The following theories have been suggested concerning this “missing” letter:

- a. It was accidentally lost at an early date. (But this is hardly consistent with the working of God’s providence, which safely guarded the rest of scriptures through the centuries.)
- b. It was judged non-canonical and discarded. (But it was apostolic, and it was suitable for public reading in the churches. These were two of the most important tests of canonicity.)
- c. It became known as the epistle to Philemon. (But there is little evidence to favor this view. Philemon was rather clearly located in Colossae, not Laodicea. Consider Colossians 4:9, 17 and Philemon 2.)
- d. It became known as the epistle to the Ephesians. While this cannot be proved, certain facts are in its favor. Ephesians seems have been a general epistle addressed to more than a single church. It has no personal greetings and addresses no local problems. If such an epistle were intended to circulate throughout all of Asia minor, it would have been sent first to Ephesus and then would have followed the trade route to Laodicea. Then it would have been sent on up the Lycus River (southward) to Colossae. Notice that the letter is not called a letter “to” the Laodiceans, but a letter “out of” Laodicea.

The probability of this connection is enhanced by the similarity of contents between Colossians and Ephesians, by the fact that the words “in Ephesus” (1:3) are lacking in the

earliest manuscripts, and by the fact that Marcion (second century) considered Ephesians to be this epistle.

**V. 17 And Say To Archippus** – Archippus was apparently a member of Philemon’s household, possibly his son. (See notes on Philemon 2.) He had a certain responsibility in the Colossian church, but no details are known.

**“See That You Fulfil The Ministry Which You Have Received In The Lord.”** – This public reminder to do his duty might well have been embarrassing to Archippus, but it certainly should have provided the necessary impetus for him to fulfil his task.

**V. 18 I, Paul, Write This Greeting With My Own Hand** – Paul normally used an amanuensis, or trained scribe, to pen his words. We know, for instance, that the man who wrote down the epistle to the Romans was named Tertius (Rom. 16:22). At the close of each epistle, Paul would then write a few words with his own hand as a mark of genuineness (II Thes. 3:17). In contrast to the neat, professional lettering of a trained scribe, Paul’s penmanship would appear awkwardly large (Gal. 6:11).

**Remember My Fetters** – Only now did Paul allow himself a personal request. He called attention to his chains (see Phil. 1:13) and implied that they should pray for him in this regard. In the parallel passage in Eph. 6:20, Paul called himself “an ambassador in chains.”

**Grace Be With You** – As always, Paul concluded his letter with a mention of grace. Grace was God’s unmerited favor which made their salvation possible. Grace was privilege of service which had ultimately led to Paul’s imprisonment (Eph. 3:7-9). Most of all, grace was God’s sufficiency in spite of Paul’s weakness (II Cor. 12:9).

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of prayer does Paul call for?
2. What was Paul’s personal request in his own behalf?
3. How can a Christian influence outsiders favorably for the gospel?
4. What is known about Tychicus?

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5. Who was Onesimus? Why was he accompanying Tychicus?
  
6. What is known about Aristarchus? How is it that the scriptures do not tell us more about this important associate of Paul?
  
7. What can we learn from Mark? How had Paul's attitude toward him changed over the years?
  
8. What was Epaphras' prayer for his fellow Colossians?
  
9. Why did the church meet in the house of Nympha? Was the "house-church" part of a divine blueprint for the church? What would be the advantages or disadvantages of meeting in "house-churches" today?
  
10. What do we know about the "letter from Laodicea"?
  
11. Why was "grace" always mentioned at the opening and the closing of Paul's letters?
  
12. What have you learned from this study of Colossians? How do you expect your life to be changed as a result?